

AUG 7 1959

Sanitized - Approved For Release : CIA-RDP75-00149R000100050006-3

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Nixon Translator Tells of Pitfalls In Anglicizing Khrushchev Quips

By Jeff O'Neill
Staff Reporter

When Vice President Richard M. Nixon stepped off the plane Wednesday after his tour of Russia and Poland, he was confronted by a cluster of placards in a now familiar language.

But those Russian slogans of "Welcome Home," and "Congratulations on Your Success" were the greeting by the State Department linguists for top interpreter Alexander Akalovsky, home from his toughest assignment.

Top-level conferences are no novelty to Yugoslavia-born Akalovsky, 35, the man news-men always listen to but never interview.

While he has interpreted discussions on the control of everything from fur seals to hydrogen bombs in his four years with the State Department's language services division he found the Iron Curtain trip his most exhausting translating job.

And his role in interpreting the Nixon-Khrushchev exchanges shows how a top linguist lifts the job of translating

ing above that of simple mechanics, and how it pays off.

Informed of his assignment to the trip, Akalovsky made a point to get to New York to analyze Nixon's manner of expression when speaking with Soviet Deputy Premier Frol Kozlov.

He also screened his memory for Khrushchev's favorite proverbs culled from his constant scanning of the Soviet press.

This stood him in good stead at the explosive "kitchen" exchange between the Premier and the Vice President at the American exhibit.

On the subject of missile supremacy, Khrushchev belligerent

Picture on Page A2
Vice President Nixon reports to National Security Council on his trip to Soviet Union and Poland.

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erently uttered a completely untranslatable expression meaning, in effect, "We'll show you!"

This having been one of the few informal meetings at which Akalovsky did not translate for both, the Soviet interpreter for Khrushchev faltered on the phrase. The Soviet press later attributed the "goof" to Nixon's interpreter. So at the next informal gathering with the press present, Akalovsky needed Russian writers for "non-objectivity," an observation that Nixon had occasion to make later.

Of course, no one would have an American equivalent to the comment Khrushchev made in ridiculing the gadgetry at the American exhibition:

"The best way to get rid of bedbugs is to pour hot water in their ears," which Akalovsky translated as, "Why use simple methods when you can use complicated ones?"

Nixon gave him a bad time with a compliment to the "pioneer spirit of Novosibirsk,"

Akalovsky said. Since the word for pioneer in Russia has come to mean a rough equivalent of Boy Scout, he blossomed forth with "spirit of conquering new horizons."

Pitfalls are always lurking, he said, always conscious that "I'm responsible for whatever our side is saying." He recalls that some years ago he almost broke up a students' meeting when translating a Soviet speaker's plea for banning nuclear weapons "so the people of the world can rest in peace."

Akalovsky, who hopes some day to enter the foreign service, calls his job the finest opportunity to watch high officials at work on a broad front.

The "only" disadvantage, in fact, is the travel. In the past 28 months, he spent only 17 at home with his wife and three small children. He once crossed paths at Geneva with his wife, Maria, also with the State Department.

After an interview yesterday at his home, at 1310 N. Meade st., Arlington, Akalovsky hoped—like Nixon—to get some rest.

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By Bob Burchette, Staff Photographer

Relaxing With Pravda

Alexander Akalovsky, 35, top State Department interpreter who accompanied Vice President Richard M. Nixon on the

trip to Russia, reads the newspaper Pravda at his home at 1310 N. Meade st., Arlington. Story on Page A1.

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